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ABSTRACT

Although the enrollments in vocational-technical education programs have been increasing steadily, a great deal of misunderstanding still exists about these programs. Vocational-technical education has an image problem. A coordinated, comprehensive communication program using a variety of media, such as newspapers, radio, and publications, should be designed to promote public understanding of vocational-technical education. A model public information program should accomplish nine goals, among which are the following: establish channels of communication with prospective vocational education students, informing them of the benefits of vocational training; establish channels of communication with parents of prospective students to inform them of the job opportunities afforded graduates of vocational programs; involve vocational educators, interested persons, and organizations in public information activities; initiate efforts to make academic teachers aware that vocational education can benefit all students who are interested in preparing for a career; and establish channels of communication with the news media. (This document suggests three to eighteen activities to accomplish each of the nine objectives.) (EM)

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A MODEL PLAN FOR PROMOTING VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Prepared by
West Virginia Department of Education
Bureau of Vocational, Technical and Adult Education

CE 018 721

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Background

The enrollments in vocational-technical education programs have been increasing steadily. But a great deal of misunderstanding still exists about the programs:

Many prospective students are not aware that vocational-technical education will prepare them for interesting, rewarding, and high-paying jobs.

Many parents think vocational-technical education is good--but for someone else's child.

Many high school teachers and counselors are not encouraging their students to pursue vocational training.

State legislators are not convinced that vocational-technical programs justify their high costs.

School administrators and trustees are not convinced that occupational education programs are as important to student development as academic courses.

The local community is not fully behind the vocational program and may not pass the bonds needed for construction of needed vocational facilities.

A combination of these factors will make it difficult for the growth curve of vocational education to continue at the rate it should.

The Present Situation

Those of us in vocational-technical education realize that we have an image problem. Many people in our organization are doing little things to improve that image. As a result, we have duplication of effort in some areas--and no effort whatsoever in other areas. Most publications and slide-tape presentations are done on a crisis basis. News releases are often on superficial spot news, rather than in-depth stories that really tell about vocational education.

But the organization does have a competent group of employees who feel strongly about the value of vocational and technical education. Their energy and talents can be focused on developing a coordinated comprehensive program for promoting occupational education.

Message Reinforcement

Through a communication plan, all materials can reflect a unified identity of vocational-technical education. All publications and audiovisuals should be designed to project the image that vocational-technical education leads to a good life. This message will be reinforced if mentioned over and over again in publications and audiovisuals.

An Introduction to the Communication Plan

The philosophy of this communication program is to promote public understanding of vocational-technical education and promote accomplishments of your institution and state. Wherever possible, we will try to tell about vocational education in ways that people can relate to: telling how much more money they can make with vocational training, showing them students who are really "success stories", telling of the importance of highly trained people working in local businesses and industry, etc.

Objectives

* Establish channels of communication with prospective vocational education students informing them of the benefits of vocational training.

* Establish channels of communication with parents of prospective students to inform them of the job opportunities afforded graduates of vocational programs.

* Involve vocational educators, interested persons, and organizations in public information activities.

* Initiate efforts to make academic teachers aware that vocational education can benefit all students who are interested in preparing for a career.

* Establish channels of communication with the news media.

* Generate community support for vocational education through contacts with local industry and organizations.

* Affect public awareness, attitudes, and actions by greatly intensifying public education and public information activities.

* Encourage state legislators to act favorably on bills supporting the growth of vocational-technical education.

* Encourage the enrollment of girls and boys in vocational programs that previously have been sex stereotyped.

Message Statement

The one basic message statement toward which all activities in the public relations plan will be directed is the following:

Vocational-technical education leads to a good life.

Subsidiary messages that will be important in making this point are:

-- Vocational graduates get good jobs and often receive higher starting pay than university graduates.

-- Vocational education programs are offered through high schools, vocational schools, and junior and community colleges.

-- Vocational education provides preparation at the secondary and postsecondary levels for occupations which require less than four years of college. This includes over 80 percent of all occupations.

-- Vocational-technical education programs are for all students who are interested in preparing for a career and who can benefit from the programs offered.

-- Vocational-technical education programs provide students with occupational knowledge and skills in such areas as agricultural, homemaking, office, distributive, industrial, technical, and health occupations.

-- Vocational courses are tailored to student needs and the job market of the community or state.

Audiences and Messages

Following is a beginning of our efforts to define who we want to talk to and what we want to say to each group:

Audience	Message
Secondary students	Vocational education is interesting, fun, and the "in" thing to do right now. Vocational graduates get good jobs and often receive higher starting pay than university graduates.
Parents, academic teachers	All students can benefit from a vocational-technical education: they can enter their career right after high school; they can use their skills to work their way through college; or their vocational skills may help them in making a career choice.
Taxpayers	Vocational-technical education is cost effective. . . graduates immediately become productive members of the community.
Teachers, vocational	Teaching in vocational education is a rewarding experience. You have an opportunity to help young people prepare for the future. You are an invaluable force for bringing about the goods of vocational education.

Audience	Message
Members of civic organizations	Vocational-technical education is vital to the growth and future of the community because it provides highly skilled persons for the local work force.
Local businessmen and women	Vocational education can provide you with capable, well-trained employees with a minimal investment.
Local news media	Vocational-technical education makes good copy; it provides "good news" about young people who are improving themselves and preparing for their future.
Opinion leaders (legislators, mayor, city council, school board)	Vocational-technical education is important to the future of this community or state. The cost is justified because graduates are able to make their own living and pay taxes.

Approach

Through the public information program, we plan to affect public awareness of vocational-technical education. A variety of media will be used: newspapers, radio, TV, publications, audiovisuals, and personal contact. Many people both within and outside of the institution will be involved in promoting vocational-technical education.

The schedule of public relations activities will naturally correlate with school activities during the year. During the fall, public relations activities may include open houses, news releases on record enrollments for the new term, and officer elections and activities of vocational organizations. Spring activities will focus more on the development of brochures to recruit new students, competition and exhibitions by vocational students, contest winners, and other such events. Public awareness activities will go on throughout the year.

On the following pages, objectives are listed and activities spelled out which accomplish the objective.

1. Establish channels of communication with prospective vocational education students which will inform them of the benefits of vocational training.

   -- Use local industry displays in school to create interest in vocational programs.

   -- Use bulletin boards at feeder schools to convey information on vocational programs.

   -- Organize a vocational students speaker's bureau to make presentations to other students on vocational programs.

   -- Arrange tours of the vocational programs for students from nearby schools.

2. Establish channels of communication with parents of prospective students to inform them of the many job opportunities afforded graduates of vocational programs.

   -- Use information on vocational programs as stuffers for report cards.

   -- Arrange for PTA members and school patrons to visit vocational classes.

   -- Send vocational newsletters to parents.

   -- Research answers to questions from citizens regarding vocational education.

3. Involve vocational educators, interested persons, and organizations in public information activities.

   -- Develop relationship with other vocational communicators within the area and explore cooperative ventures.

   -- Provide inservice training for vocational personnel on public relations programs.

   -- Contact persons from the advisory council, local AVA affiliate, vocational teachers groups, PTA, and others to discuss mutual activities in promoting vocational education and new activities that can be jointly undertaken.

   -- Organize an internal advisory committee on public relations which meets once a month. Set policies, procedures, and identify problem areas in relation to public relations.

   -- Establish staff news sheet to keep staff aware of internal vocational education activities.

4. Initiate efforts to make academic teachers aware that vocational education can benefit all students who are interested in preparing for a career.

   -- Hold vocational open house for academic faculty.

   -- Provide academic faculty with information on vocational education to use in career education programs.

   -- Publicize in school newspaper tours of vocational programs by students from feeder schools.

5. Establish channels of communication with the news media.

   -- Have a monthly visit with a radio, TV, or newspaper news director to establish their needs as well as yours.

   -- Prepare a press packet on vocational education giving appropriate background information.

   -- Hold open house for the press of vocational programs featuring student demonstrations.

6. Generate community support for vocational education through contacts with local industry and organizations.

   -- Publicize student visits to local industry.

   -- Use merchant window displays to show vocational program opportunities.

   -- Prepare signs saying, "This Business Employs Vocational Cooperative Education Students" for display.

   -- Use direct mail to promote vocational education with local leaders and groups.

   -- Invite local business leaders to serve as members of vocational advisory committees, resource persons for vocational classes, or club contest judges.

   -- Create a speaker's bureau which will make presentations to civic groups. Identify faculty and students who would be willing and able to discuss vocational education. Conduct 2-3 hour briefing on how to approach a public audience. Identify and contact civic organizations concerning speaking engagements.

   -- Prepare mailing list of industry, civic groups, and interested persons to receive vocational publications.

   -- Present advisory group members with certificates or plaques for service.

7. Affect public awareness, attitudes, and actions by greatly intensifying public education and public information activities.

   -- Write, edit, and publish a vocational education annual report that is appropriate for internal and external distribution.

   -- Publicize vocational programs during American Education Week and Vocational Education Week.

   -- Promote vocational activities with proclamation by the mayor/governor. Encourage this official to have a press conference concerning vocational education when issuing the proclamation.

   -- Sponsor a vocational fair or exhibition.

   -- Display billboard advertising to promote vocational programs.

   -- Publicize student banquets and activities of vocational clubs.

   -- Write feature stories for educationally-oriented publications.

   -- Write, edit, and publish brochures and pamphlets promoting vocational education.

   -- Plan and organize a display on vocational education that can be used at conferences, shopping malls, schools, etc.

   -- Use followup of graduates to promote vocational education "success stories."

   -- Develop and print vocational education bumper stickers.

   -- Publish a vocational alumni newsletter.

   -- Produce local TV program on vocational education.

   -- Use radio spot announcements to remind people of vocational programs available to them.

   -- Publicize vocational organizations' competition winners.

   -- Produce regularly scheduled radio programs on vocational education topics.

   -- In cooperation with local newspaper, prepare special supplement on vocational education. Encourage employers of cooperative students to buy ads saluting their student employees.

   -- Submit news releases concerning vocational education to the local media on a regular basis.

8. Encourage state legislators to act favorably on bills supporting the growth of vocational education.

   -- Work with legislative liaison in providing materials of interest to legislators regarding vocational education.

   -- Invite local legislators to tour vocational facilities.

   -- Invite legislators to youth group conventions where they can see the benefits of leadership activities.

   -- Urge local citizens who are involved in vocational education to write their legislators concerning the benefits of vocational programs.

   -- Work with vocational organizations in presenting a united front before the legislature on proposed vocational education legislation.

9. Encourage the enrollment of girls and boys in vocational programs that previously have been sex stereotyped.

   -- Revise and update existing slide shows to include girls and boys in non-traditional occupations.

   -- Develop new slide shows aimed primarily at one sex emphasizing that today you can enter any occupation which you choose.

   -- Revise and update existing publications to include girls and boys in non-traditional occupations.

Research and Followup

Continuous evaluation will be essential for your public relations program so that you can determine whether your messages are "hitting" or "missing." Research and followup on the information program may be conducted in these ways:

A. A running log be kept of every public relations activity undertaken. This also will list successes. For instance, TV stations probably will send a notice when they have used a public service spot. A newspaper clip file should be kept up to date.

B. Six months after the general public information program begins, a questionnaire should be distributed to a random sample of the community/state citizens asking if they have heard good things about vocational education recently. If yes, can they recall specifically what they heard, where, from whom, or through what medium, etc.

C. Similar followup surveys will be implemented after one year, 18 months, two years, three years, until results are satisfactory.

D. Design and distribute a similar questionnaire to members of your staff to find out how successful internal communications are: if they under-

stand the organizational structure, some information about persons and programs with which they don't work, the number of specialized vocational-technical programs they can name. Staff will be asked to keep track of their personal contacts with the public which build the image of vocational-technical education.

E. If funds allow, organize a door-to-door survey of a random sample of homes in the community asking people how you can improve your vocational-technical program, if it serves their needs, and if they are aware of what it offers.

All research and followup activities should track the original objectives developed for the communications plan.

For additional information, write to:

Coordinator, Program Development
West Virginia Department of Education
Bureau of Vocational, Technical and Adult Education
Building 6, Room B-221
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

This model is based on materials accumulated from Kentucky, Minnesota, and West Virginia.